ELECTRO-HARMONIX GOES TO RUSSIA

BY FAYE LEVINE

The Electro-Harmonix Work Band performing in Russia.

This article was originally published shortly after Electro-Harmonix's visit to the Soviet Union in July of 1979.

STRANGE EYES

At curtain rise, six musicians are standing in front of a luminescent tapestry of atomic spirals, symbols, and words rotating and flashing. The crowd that has gathered to hear them is packed arm-to-arm, scarcely able to move. Everyone is pouring sweat. The temperature seems to be over 100 F. All these neatly dressed people are excited to be here, and hearing the famous Americans. But something between suspicion and curiosity immobilizes their faces, and they stare at the stage with strange eyes. Caught at just one instant, in the permanence of a photograph, this audience appears to be stunned, or horrified, or sleepy, or sad, or perhaps thinking, "you've got to be kidding!"

Then Willie Magee, who once played guitar in Harlem's famed Apollo Theatre, motions the Electro-Harmonix Work Band to begin with a certain number by K.C. and the Sunshine Band, in C, all at once 98 decibels of "Shake Your Body" are echoing through Sokolniki Park and nearby Red Square and bringing the news to the better part of downtown Moscow.

Paul Staff in goggles, satin, and American flag motif shirt waits for his cue and then swings in acrobatically from the band pavilion's dome-like ceiling, narrowly missing the lead guitarist Larry DeMarco's eye (it bleeds; the show goes on). The president of the company, Mike Matthews, is putting down a heavy lead on the electric piano through the all-time best-selling electronic music accessory, the "Small Stone," alongside the bass of Kenney Richardson. Charles (Cookie) Cook on drums completes the ensemble. And though the group has never played together before, and has not practiced one song before their performing debut, by the end of this two-week Russia gig all bands members will agree that this was the hottest, most energetic, most memorable music experience of their lives.

And now the Russians are beginning to smile! "You don't see a whole lot of smiling going on in Moscow," notes Willie. Though they are packed together so tight they barely have room to lift their elbows, somehow the Russian audience has started to clap, at Willie and Paul's urging, to Sly and the Family Stone's "I Want to Take You Higher," But, oh, no, what's this? Now Willie

has his teeth on the strings and he is eating his guitar, to the tune of B. B. King's "Stormy Monday." Shock and disbelief. Cries of "encore!" The crowd is enjoying it to death.

When the set is finished the Russians mob the stage for autographs and conversation. Lovely young translators bring flowers. It looks like the amazing experiment is going to work. "I knew if the music was there, everything else would follow" says Mike.

And the response from the Russians grows and grows, by word of mouth, and by a general public radio invitation to the trade show in the park where the band is performing. Until, by the end of the week, the disciplined and respectful Soviet citizens are rocking so hard the concrete building where the E-H concerts have been going on is shaking. The younger members of the band have never experienced anything like it. "It's been nice knowing ya," says Kenney to Larry. Larry expects to have to go over the wall, like a football player in Chile. Plaster comes down from the ceiling. A fluorescent light fixture comes down. Finally the Russian police stop the show, fearing the entire side of the building is in danger. A thousand Russians don't leave, but they do move back immediately and in near silence.

"In America people would have been yellin' back, 'You move me!'" observes Willie. But the Russians "are very strict about accidents. They don't like nobody gettin' hurt."

And with the crowd comes fame. "The name Electro-Harmonix is as well known now in Russia as the name Coca-Cola," declares a German trade show specialist headquartered in the same pavilion.

"Every show was like a Madison Square Garden concert," says Willie.

And for the austerely-living Russians, who must wait on line for many hours to get even the necessities, and who consider a plastic bag a luxury, the Electro-Harmonix musicians were, in Kenney's words, "an exotic injection, a shot of ecstasy."

GETTING THERE

How did the Electro-Harmonix Work Band come to be in russia in the first place? Well, in most other companies the letter of invitation to no one in particular, and written in a language nobody understood, would have been tossed into the wastebasket. But it is the policy of E-H to put foreign mail, even anonymous, on the president's desk. Mike Matthews had this one translated, mulled it over for a while, and decided it might be a good idea. The U.S.S.R. Chamber of Commerce and Industry was opening its three-year-old Consumer Goods and Fashions Exhibition in Moscow to international participants for the first time, in anticipation of the 1980 Moscow Olympics.

Mike then delegated responsibility for administrating the trip to Manny Zapata, who put in about twenty hours a day of phone calls talking to the various embassies, ministries, under-ministries, and intermediaries.

When the first wave of Electro-Harmonix scouts got to Russia and walked around the huge trade show in Moscow's Skolniki Park, they found out that E-H was one of only two exhibitors from the U.S. (The other was Levi Strauss.) There was no other live music. Some Japanese booths were exhibiting TV and audio equipment—but nothing had remotely the flair of the Electro-Harmonix line.

Mike lets some enthusiastic Russians market-test a secret new product (the Mini-Synthesizer).

Precisely at that moment Mike was on a speeding plane, high on the E-H lights. Shortly before he had left New York, his brawny shipping department had carried big loads of flashing light designs—Art Lumo—over to Bloomingdale's, to the Museum of Natural History's Hayden Planetarium, and to the classy Museum of Modern Art. Orders for the lights were firmed up at each stop. Then the lights were hustled back to the factory and carefully repacked for the trip to Russia.

Going through customs, Bob Bednarz, inventor and designer, is carrying a few of the lights. The young customs officer squints at his passport picture for a long time.

"And what's that?"

"It's a Salt II Set." (By which Bob means, of course, both in flashing light designs.)

"Excuse me?" says the customs inspector.

"It's a picture," modifies Bob.

The young man looks again. It has a frame. He guesses it's all right.

All assembled again in Russia, the musician's flashing backdrop is so stunning that one German businessman offers to buy the whole E-H booth. And even when the AC electricity goes off for a moment one afternoon, plunging the area into silence and darkness, E-H continues to flash. The wall of light art flashes. The hammer and sickle inside the red star flashes. The Moorangles and Spirals and Bounces flash. At the throats of all six E-H musicians, Manny, and Bob, little triplets of red LEDs called Redliners flash, giving off an irresistible aura of guru-hood. And virtually all these myriad multi-colored lights in their variegated patterned flowing are subliminally beating in time to the Chicago-type riff Cookie is laying down, in the middle of the silence, on the drums.

ON THE TOWN

Paul is in a beret and scarf, frowning like a garret artist out of 1890, walking through the wide and muralled streets of Moscow with Kenney and Larry, all three high-booted, all in flashy gear, all enjoying the Russians' reaction to their style. They see some people in blue jeans, but jeans are still a hard item to get, hot like all things American, Marlboros, and T-shirts, and records. Larry trades a pair of white pants for a Russian navy shirt. Kenney is offered $1000 for his $200 Marantz cassette recorder. The group is shown a crude homemade flanger estimated to have a value of $1200. An $800 drum set is priced at $6000. And a high-level film and TV engineer makes a discreet request for the absolutely unattainable Beatles' film "Help!"

There are no advertisements to be seen in the streets. Just these big murals, putting forth Soviet virtues. Paul poses for a photograph in front of one that shows a man and a woman with big arms, holding hand near open hand, in a gesture not of love but of equality. And then for another with—is it Karl Marx?

During the day our men admire the clean Moscow metro, with its big metal sculptures of different types of workers, More than once in the middle of the night they find cause to praise the communist medicine for the masses: Manny's stomachache is taken care of by a woman doctor in the hotel within minutes of his complaint. And Kenney is given a pill and told to drink vodka and put vodka in his ear; it works.

In the cool Russian evenings after their work at the trade show is done, the E-H musicians habituate the hotel restaurants where the musicians of Moscow can be heard.

The first thing they notice is how much Western music the Russians know. Audiences at the fair have asked about, and now the musicians in the hotel restaurants are playing the music of: the Beatles, the Stones, Charlie Parker, B.B. King, Miles Davis, George Benson, Stevie Wonder, Donna Summer, even the Village People. They haven't heard (Larry and Paul discover) of Blondie or Steely Dan.

The next thing they notice is that the Russian hotel bands—the only live music in the city—read from printed sheets, and don't move as they play. The Russians are "good musicians technically," says Mike, "and on the classical level they're much more advanced than the U.S. But they're just getting their feelings together for rock." Willie finds this horrible: that even the musicians in Russia are so straight, they don't groove to the music. "75% of the music is feelings!" he exclaims warmly. "And they stand there and don't even pat their feet!"

One night in the Berlin Restaurant Kenney, egged on by Mike and others, jams with a Russian band on "Saturday Night Fever." Kenney calls the musicians slightly hipper than the average Russian, with blue jeans and longish hair, and says the lead guitarist "had something devious about him, like the guitarist of Black Sabbath." They are accompanied by a girl singer. "They welcomed me with open hands," says Kenney diplomatically. "They played rock, but not dirty rock," says Paul.

The musicians mentioned that they don't tour. They are hired to work for the government in a particular restaurant, and that's it. The group is then known as the Berlin Restaurant group, or the Havana Restaurant group, etc.

So Bob goes out looking for some real Russian musicians, some romantics, existentialists, nihilists. He finds a group called Time Machine. Seven or eight members. Suffering and beautiful. Modestly, they deny their own

existence. Later a teenager from the Moscow diplomatic community will call them "the best and the most popular" of the underground rock groups.

Time Machine tells Bob about smoking English pipe tobacco that is so expensive it takes a year of saving for, in preference to the "cabbage" most Russians smoke. They ask him earnestly for the secret of which Western groups use which electronic effects. But either this secret is inviolable, or else Bob, the longhaired scientist, is simply unfamiliar with the groups of interest to this band—"they had names like Space and Intergalactica," he recalls vaguely.

Another night Bob goes out with some new friends and drinks many bowls of foreign wine before moving on to the vodka. A Russian man with a face as perfect as Nureyev's moans, "My whole life is ruined!" It seems he committed an indiscretion with a previous job superior in a closet, and was busted to translating laundry lists for a living.

Bob is the only one in the group whose suitcase never makes it back to America; the last time he saw it was in the Moscow airport. It contained one college-level digital engineering textbook, one book of Sanskrit chants with a half-naked man on the cover, and a lot of dirty laundry.

THE ELECTRO-HARMONIX WORK BAND WORKS OUT!

Meanwhile, back at the trade show, the American music is burnin'. "The band was cookin'," says Willie. "We was cookin'. We hit the stage and we done 'em. We burned 'em. We burned. We burned 'em up." He goes on: "Someone was going around the park saying in Russian, 'An American band is down at pavilion 5 and they're playing some bad stuff!!'"

In the eyes of many Russians, the most startling performer is Paul, dancing and singing quasi-harmonies and enjoying himself more than anyone. He is giving his name as "Duane Atlas." Paul's stage gear features roller skates with big yellow wheels, goggles, a black jumpsuit, an electric pink and black satin shirt, an Uncle Sam tie, and more of the like. Between songs he ducks backstage to change costume. "His hotel room looked like 'Jumpin' Jack Flash," remarks Kenney. "He had about seven pairs of boots."

"Paul compares his act to Alice Cooper's. Cookie calls him a "million dollar showman." Kenney says, "he glided around on the roller skates like the Alien." Other bandmembers call him unorthodox, eccentric, exciting, electrifying. "We were a molecule, a piece of energy!" exclaims Paul. The highlight of the show, he says, was Wilson Pickett's "Midnight Hour," during which he flew in from the ceiling.

But everyone in the band is a star, and, to the great delight of the Russian audience, bandleader Willie gives everyone an introduction and a solo. Here's "I Want to Take You Higher"—first Cookie, with some funky drum licks; then Willie and Paul rousing the crowd with a capella vocals; then "bad" bass from Kenney; then a syncopated electric piano riff by Mike; then Larry in with his searing lead guitar coming through four or more Electro-Harmonix effects. Willie and Paul are yelling, "Higher! Higher!" Across the way, a British soap booth is getting addicted to the number. A 10-year-old from a nearby pavilion jumps to the stage to dance with Paul.

Willie describes the Electro-Harmonix Work Band program as "heavy funk, with a touch of disco and r&b." He himself sings most of the vocals with great soul. And he plays a driving rhythm guitar that is all smoke and steam, a getting up energy thing guaranteed to make people move, in counterpoint to the rhythms of Mike on keyboard. Their songs include "Booty," "Higher," "Stormy Monday," "Midnight Hour," the Marathons' "Peanut Butter," Bill Withers' "Ain't No Sunshine When She's Gone," the Kinks' "It's Too Late," and an original number by Paul, "Thinking of You." Willie purposely concentrates on a small number of songs, so the band, playing everything for the first time, can really get into a groove on each one.

On the "Peanut Butter" chorus, the band substitutes the Russian words "Yalu bluvas" (I love you), and watches 99% of the Russian women dissolve into discreet abandon. Mike and Paul improvise lyrics about how they are feeling, about being drunk, about the ladies they miss back home. Between sets, Mike passes around an unusual little toy keyboard—a secret new E-H product being market-tested in the safety of the Russian field—and as many as 3/4 of the Russians easily pick out popular Western or classical tunes.

Larry takes a lot of guitar solos, easily generating excitement with the Muff Fuzz distortion box alone. He also makes use of a chain of E-H effects—Micro-synthesizer to Clone Theory to Polyphase to Deluxe Memory Man with Chorus—for a superstrong five-dimensional intro to the powerful "I Want to Take You Higher." The musically sophisticated Russian audience can hear the Microsynthesizer coming on: they "ooh and aah" and point to the little box on the stage floor. When the mood strikes him, Larry switches to another circuit—Polyflanger to Soul Preacher compressor to the new Vocoder—for a circusy, crowd pleasing, entirely different sound. Then he soars on the top-of-the-line Guitar Synthesizer, magnificent with its 41 switches in rainbow colors.

Kenney does his funky and hip modern bass licks using the Clone Theory and Bassballs (a special bass device containing two tuned envelope followers). But he is not playing his usual instrument, which is guitar. "Playing bass for me is like going through old doors," says Kenney. "Bass was the first instrument I ever played. But I haven't touched it in years. Bass to me is like satire. I don't take it seriously." Still, the experience is so enlightening for Kenney, who is a great bass player, that when he gets back to the States he fires the bass player in his homegroup Midnight Flight.

The Digital Rhythm Matrix, or DRM-16, is frequently demonstrated. Drummer Cookie endorses its sixteen preset controllably rhythm schemes as right-on. "Whoever put that thing together has a good sense of rhythm!"

At one point between sets, a Russian soprano sax player steps out of the audience, ready and eager to try the Electro-Harmonix array of devices. But his electric plug has the wrong kind of connector, and he speaks no English. Hardly missing a beat, a Russian-American team solders his axe directly into the Deluxe Memory Man, and the Russian is soaring through the Polyphase and the new E-H synthesizers. "He sounded like

"AN AMERICAN BAND IS DOWN AT PAVILION 5 AND THEY'RE PLAYING SOME BAD STUFF!" (left to right): Paul Staff, Willie Magee, Larry De Marco and Kenney Richardson.

(left to right) Paul Staff, Willie Magee, Larry De Marco, Mike Matthews and Kenney Richardson.

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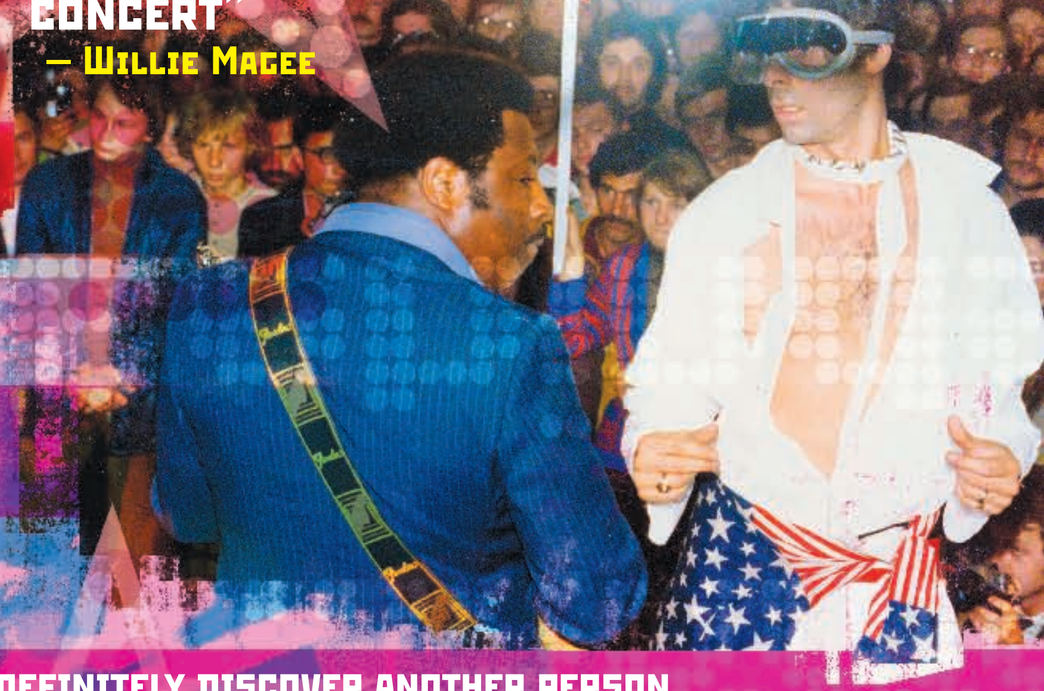
— Charles "Cookie" Cook

"Every show was like a Madison Square Garden concert"

— Willie Magee



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"The Russians are good musicians technically... but they're just getting their feelings together for rock."

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— Paul Staff

ELECTRO-HARMONIX GOES TO RUSSIA

Weather Report," recalls Kenney.

Another time, a Pole comes by with an Electric Mistress flanger he bought by mail-order from West Germany, requesting a minor repair.

Khalid Hafeez, a Pakastani teenager, tapes the complete Electro-Harmonix repertoire, which he intends to learn for his group The Fakirs. He is impressed with the band's smoothnes—"just like a record!"—and with guitarist Larry's playing, which reminds him of Santana's.

"Mike Matthews has the vitality of an eight-year-old," says Cookie. "Who else could put a band together in one day and have them draw these kinds of crowds? The Electro-Harmonix Work Band could be a top group if they stayed together! And Mike could make it as a musician anywhere," says Cookie.

MOSCOW GIRLS

And what are the wages of musical accomplishment? Love and sex, of course; chocolate cakes and flowers and maidens to pull you into the bushes and force you to have relations with them. Crowded taxi rides out into the country past Hansel and Gretel farms, full of giggling and laughter. Deep conversations in foreign lands with sweet and secret personalities you will remember later as the essence of that place. The eyes watching the muscles of your forearm as you strum. The request for autographs. The absurd gifts. The notes and the sign language.

"You definitely discover another person inside yourself with all the worship, all the varnish," says Paul quietly. "You try not to destroy what they're giving you, an American: happiness, acceptance, love. You try not to destroy it by taking it for granted."

Kenney finds the Russian women easy to talk to, "without the layers and layers" of social games. But after a woman tells him that there are as many religions in the U.S.S.R. as there are in the U.S.A., he doesn't take what they say so seriously.

Paul has a conversation about religion, too. A woman translator says she doesn't believe in God; Paul says he does; she asks him why. Paul looks around and waves his arms. "The sky! The trees!"

She asks, "Is that what's important to you?"

And Paul says, "These little insignificant conversations are important to me. Everything don't have to be big. Like that tree—just cause it don't have apples...!"

At night one of the peasant women comes to clean the fair pavilion. She refuses a $1 tip, having never seen such a thing before. "Why didn't you bring more women," she asks. "to clean up for you?" She thinks it is a small booth, all things considered, for the United States of America. And she declares, "I'm a Christian. I love America!"

ROCK AND FREEDOM

One day Russian girls act out in sign language, "Are you on drugs?" Everyone thinks this is very funny. "That's an old line we used to use in my group," Kenney laughs: "You must be on drugs."

"We symbolized freedom for them," says Larry. "They looked at us and thought about all the cool and wonderful things that we're able to do."

Larry sees the expressiveness of rock & roll as connected with individualism, and something that can't exist under communism. Onstage he wears a pair of handmade ostrich cowboy boots. But he notices that in Moscow there is no abject poverty, no bums, no one unemployed and drinking wine in the street.

Manny notices that in two weeks in Moscow that there are no fights, no police, no sirens. He enjoys being considered an American, instead of as in the U.S., a South American.

Mike's verdict on communism is that "it was the type of banding together that was needed in Russia, with its wretched Czarist conditions, to start things on a new basis. But now they need major aspects of our system, and that's the direction they're flowing towards."

SURVIVAL AND OTHER PROBLEMS

But it wasn't all chocolate cake. Willie and Manny, in fact, thought that they were going to die of starvation; they couldn't get used to the Russian food. Willie remembers with horror a chicken served nearly raw, and with feathers! Manny ordered "filet" from a restaurant menu, took a look at it, tasted it, and decided it was horse or bear. The two of them took to eating tinned fish, and carrying unwrapped loaves of bakery bread under their arms through the streets, like Ben Franklin. They stocked up on hard-boiled eggs in the morning, lest nothing else palatable come their way during the day.

"I was looking forward to caviar," says Kenney, "but it was really nasty." And there it was on every table next to the bread and butter, automatically.

Mike loved the borscht that wasn't purple, though; and Bob dug the herring and the chicken soup in workers' cafes on sidestreets; but the others pined for food of home. "The can't-get-a-Coke syndrome," scoffed Bob. Soon ice cream became a kind of staple. Willie and Manny ordered it for dinner. When Mike dozed off on his first night wiped out from jet lag, the others ate his ice cream. "I want a full report on this in the morning," he joked, when he woke.

"I KNEW IF THE MUSIC WAS THERE, EVERYTHING ELSE WOULD FOLLOW"

– MIKE MATTHEWS

And there were all kinds of other little problems. A local phone call cost only 3 cents, but a phone call back to the United States required a 24-hour reservation. The suitcases were days late arriving, and Willie was a little put out that he had to make do with an improvised Russian toothbrush the size of a shoe brush. Intourist, the Soviet tourist agency, perhaps sensing the dangerous fusion power inherent in their lodging together, had divided the Work Band up into three groups: Mike, Willie, and Manny at the Intourist Hotel; Cookie, Paul, Kenney, and Larry at the Hotel Russiya; and Bob at the Leningradskaya. And the hotels offered some surprises. Narrow single beds. A bidet that attacked Mike. Windows that couldn't be shaded against the 19 hours of northern latitude sunlight. A woman sitting at a desk near the elevator on each floor who seemed to be keeping track of everyone's comings and comings—and who politely quizzed one of the group who stayed away one night. A mysterious thick wire going up to the ceiling. A radio with only a volume control, from which enamated, a Nat King Cole song in French, a march, balalaika, accordion, a big band, a George Shearing type smoothness.

The group took well enough to Russian vodka, though. They estimate that they drank about a fifth apiece, of straight 100 proof, every day. But the music sweat it out of them, and they didn't get drunk. This immunity was not permanent. When Kenney brought a couple bottles home to New York for his band, one shot finished him off.

TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

"It was good no one tried to kill anyone else," says Cookie.

One day a Russian followed Willie to the men's room and started asking him questions there. "Is Mike Matthews your boss? Is he a good boss? How much money do you make? Do you have a car?" Willie was shocked. No one had ever asked him questions like that. Certainly not in the bathroom. He wondered if the guy was a government spy.

Kenney saw red one time. Not when he noticed a man following him; he didn't mind that so much. No, it was over something a girl said, that he interpreted as an insult. The young woman came up to the stage among many fans from the audience after a set and asked him where he was from. Kenney told her. Then she said something he remembers as "your people (causing) trouble in New York." Kenney, who is black, remembers her screwing up her mouth in a funny way, and giving off a negative vibe. At that moment, he says, "I could have ripped her face off."

So Mike gave Kenney a guitar and let him play solo with Cookie till the violence was all out of his system. Cookie played like a killer, like Buddy Miles, his foot pounding heavy and complicated. And Kenney? "It was a vindictive extraterrestrial energy," he says of it himself. "Fiendish like Hendrix," says Paul. After a hot fifteen minutes, the moment was past.

Manny took care of all the painstaking details involved in the setting up and running of the show, and with his great patience coped with the demands of the Russian bureaucracy. By a miracle, Manny got the booth opened on time. He spent a full day waiting on line for return plane tickets. In charge of transportation for the group, he had ample opportunity to meditate on the Moscow traffic. (His observations: that all the cars are the same shape. That taxis are light green, government cars are black, and there are few other kinds of car. In a whole day he saw only two Volkswagens, and no other non-Russian makes.)

But when the electric plug was pulled for the second time—that was the last straw. Manny stormed over to the man in charge in the pavilion and almost killed him (he says). In fact no one was even remotely hurt. The power went right back on. But even reminiscing about it, Manny's face gets red.

Another time, Mike nearly caused a riot. To understand how, just consider that the album "Hey Jude" would bring well over $100 in Russia. So when Mike started handing out, free, the Electro-Harmonix Work Band album "State of the Art Electronic Devices," the crowd went wild, berserk. They got red and excited; someone got hit in the mouth. Later bandmembers reflected that it would have been like passing out money in Times Square.

Soon enough the Intourist translator called the affair to an abrupt halt, with a decided military overtone in her voice. All remaining records would have to be shipped back to the United States.

So Mike switched to catalogs and advertising material, which toned the riot down a notch. The Russian audience eagerly grabbed up—and gave back to the band to be autographed—20,000 articles reprinted from Rolling Stone and Beat Instrumental and by the store Daddy's Junky Music, and 50,000 small E-H stickers. Seeing the stickers later all over Moscow on hotel walls and on the side of briefcases, the band wondered to just what distant outpost of communism the little E-H logo would be transported in future times.

During the course of the show, Mike met and negotiated with the directors of several different Russian organizations, dealing with everything from high technology to import and export of consumer goods. Specialists from these organizations were already familiar with Electro-Harmonix products—in fact, they were surprised to learn that "Small Stone" was not an entire company itself. Strong interest was expressed by the Russians in purchasing E-H devices for use in a lending library situation in their country.

SCIENTIFIC EXCHANGE

Bob the scientist did not feel there was much he could learn from his Russian counterparts. Unlike the U.S., the U.S.S.R. does not filter its space technology down into consumer products. "At the highest level the electronics is just as good as ours," Bob says, "but in a controlled society there's no impulse to build crazy things."

Instead of calculators in the stores, he saw a lot of Japanese abacuses. And the one keyboard synthesizer he saw was made with transistors. As for the components, he found "a general level of poverty of things I take for granted. Things I have lying around on my desk, they would give anything for." The ICs shown him were 12 years old and crude with respect to noise and amplification. Still he was impressed with the Russian engineers' energy, and their will to work even against formidable odds.

He did learn something he didn't know from a beautiful female physicist: that neon lasers can cure skin problems.

CITADELS

On the Fourth of July the Electro-Harmonix Work Band are guests in the home of the U.S. Ambassador to Russia for an Independence Day party. What a treat! Familiar food! The green taxi takes the band to the wrong place, but after a hike of a mile or two through the Moscow streets, "Mike leading with his head in the air, the rest following like sheep," recalls Paul, they arrive at the palatial diplomatic establishment, with its driveway full of Mercedes and a liveried doorman announcing distinguished guests, and they walk right in.

Two or three members of the Electro-Harmonix contingent are wearing red flashing lights around their necks. "What are those for?" asks someone in a three-piece suit. "To attract attention," answers Bob. In honor of the holiday Paul is sporting his Uncle Sam tie, and ceremoniously gives the most beautiful woman present an almond in a shell. The band is in their most formal attire, neat and handsome. Mike, in fact, looks so debonair in his upper-class Mafioso outfit of white suit, dark blue shirt, and dark blue tie, that the Russian honor guard snaps to attention and salutes him.

At the citadel of Americanism the Work Band hangs out, scarfs down a pizza and turkey legs and guzzles fresh orange juice and stuffs additional turkey legs into a briefcase for the hours ahead. "It was so amazing to me," say Cookie. "My existence is trees, sunshine, a nice job in the country" (he lives in upstate new York and works as a radio sportscaster), "and all of a sudden here I am with Ambassador Toon having a Fourth of July brunch!"

Toward the end of their stay, the band makes pilgrimages in groups to Red Square and the Kremlin. Everyone is impressed.

I really felt like I was in Russia," says Kenney. "The moon was playing its role. The clock struck. The guards came marching out. The Kremlin was on one side, this big department store on the other. There was this big echo, three guys sounded like twenty. They marched to Lenin's Tomb. When the clock struck its gong, they changed shirts like clockwork, and marched back and disappeared. The Kremlin flag of red silk was always blowing, even when there was no wind."

Mike goes with the boys to Lenin's Tomb, where he feels he is back in summer camp. The air is fresh and clean from the northern winds, and a lovely 65 degrees.

Willie is struck by the red brick and the beautiful, huge, gold stars of the capitol.

And the American superstars, in the end, stagger back to the Hotel Russiya—still high on the Kremlin, and American rock and blues, and the party with the Ambassador, and looking and feeling and sounding so great—and there in the gigantic hotel ballroom some kind of party has finished up. There are still scraps of food on the tables, reflected in the chandeliers, and the echo of festivity in the heavy red velvet curtains. Mike goes up to the piano on the stage slowly, like a wrestler, to give it a work-out.

Paul recalls (Kenney is now falling asleep with his head on the tablecloth) Mike getting his blues on; then turning quiet and soft, letting out his soul. There in Moscow, after midnight on a summer night, the pounding, spiking music that only the president of Electro-Harmonix can make is pouring and rolling from the grand piano on the stage of the Hotel Russiya, for the benefit of the few couples, the few old people, the cluster of restaurant employees, who are still sitting around the mostly deserted czarist ballroom.

After a while Paul joins Mike, and both make up words to their 10,000 miles from home visions. And a fat waitress who speaks no English lumbers over to give Mike one of the workers' precious, hoarded bananas.

HOME AGAIN

And then, of course, eventually, it's time to come home. Instead of being John Lennon, you're just a guy on the F train again. Instead of listening dreamily to the strange whisperings of Asians in fezzes around the corner from the Red Square, it's the usual obscenities on 23rd Street. But still, these eight guys walk around for two weeks a foot off the floor, bumping into each other, unable to speak of it, really, to anybody. They are astronauts. They have been to the moon. ★

The Electro-Harmonix crew packs up for home.

THE ELECTRO-HARMONIX WORK BAND

Independence Day Party, July 4, 1979, U.S. Ambassador's Residence, Moscow

(left to right): Kenney Richardson, Manny Zapata, Charles (Cookie) Cook, Mike Matthews, Willie Magee, Bob Bednarz (standing), Larry De Marco, and Paul Staff.

Kenney Richardson quality control and new products musician tester and international salesman, played bass in Moscow, though his usual instrument is guitar. He was tapped for the trip because Mike likes his fluid and refreshing playing style, and because he is also a great demonstrator. "The gamble paid off—he was essential on bass. And his cosmopolitan sophistication and cool beauty swept a lot of the hippest Russian chicks off their feet," according to Mike.

Manny Zapata director of international marketing administration, was responsible for the details of setting up and running of the show, as well as the logistics of the trip, all of which he handled with superhuman skill. Mike calls Manny "a brilliant action-oriented administrator."

Charles (Cookie) Cook of Ithaca, N.Y. on drums was the only member of the WORK BAND not currently working at Electro-Harmonix in New York. A friend and musical partner from Mike's college days, Cookie was at that time playing for U.S. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. Mike says he's seen hundreds and hundreds of drummers, "and Cookie is one of my all time favorites. His secret is simplicity with the hands, and enormous power in intricate off-syncopated patterns, with his foot. He really makes you feel the band."

Mike Matthews president of Electro-Harmonix, played dominant leads and rhythms on electric piano through the Small Stone. An entrepreneur, industrialist, and musician, Mike conceived of, produced, and directed the Russia trip, and put together the band as composed here. Through his foresight, based on success doing business with Hungary and at trade shows in East Germany, space was booked in Moscow before first word of Elton John's summer tour there broke, the event confirmed Mike's thoughts about the potential both to do business in Russia and to have some fun there too, turning people on with E-H sounds and lights.

Willie Magee vice president of sales, "played driving guitar, sang heavy soul, and for a show-stopper picked his guitar with his teeth." In Russia Willie took charge of the band and gave the music a fabric. "Without him, there would have been the chaos of a jam session," says Mike. "But he insisted on a top quality professional show."

Bob Bednarz artist and engineer, was sent to Russia to install his newly-designed line of electronic art, one of Mike's favorite projects of the future.

Larry De Marco customer relations manager, played lead guitar using a great variety of Electro-Harmonix sound effects, from the simple and tiny Muff Fuzz to the new and complicated Micro-sythesizer. He was selected for the trip over the many other excellent lead guitar players in the company because he is, in Mike's opinion, the best demonstrator and "a virtuoso player whose lead riffs astonished Russia's leading artists. Just give him a couple of packs of cigarettes, and he'll play all day." Last year Larry worked the Leipzig trade show in east Germany all by himself, where he was mobbed.

Paul Staff sales and special promo man, sang, danced, and performed many feats of showmanship for the Russian audience. He and Mike work especially well together on vocal and piano, with Paul making up 3/4 of their lyrics and Mike doing 3/4 of the melody and musical feel. "We can groove together anytime," says Mike, "and he'll always knock me out."